

20 May 2022

Health Alert: Monkeypox

Two probable cases of monkeypox have been identified in Australia (New South Wales and Victoria) in returned travellers in the past week. There are 15 confirmed cases detected in other non-endemic countries (countries outside of Africa), including the United Kingdom, Portugal and the USA, with a further 38 cases suspected in Spain, Portugal and Canada. Most cases have been identified in those identifying as gay, bisexual or men who have sex with men.

If clinicians do suspect monkeypox they need to discuss the case with the Infectious Diseases Physician on-call who will involve the Territory Pathology specialist for testing requirements.

Isolate the patient and ask them to wear a surgical mask while discussing the case.

Monkeypox

Monkeypox is a viral zoonotic disease which is transmitted to humans through close contact with an infected animal (most common), person or contaminated materials. The monkeypox virus is related to smallpox, however is less contagious and causes less severe disease. It usually occurs in West and Central Africa and detection can follow in people returning from these countries. Local transmission has been observed in the current cases in non-endemic countries.

Human to human transmission can occur through direct mucosal or skin contact with lesion material or via respiratory droplets, and can be passed on by direct contact during sexual activity or contact with clothing and linen used by an infected person.

Symptoms

Clinical symptoms of monkeypox include:

- fever
- malaise
- chills
- body aches
- headache
- lymphadenopathy (usually prominent)
- rash – starting as a macular rash which is often first noticed in the mouth before spreading to the face, arms and legs. The rash typically develops through papular, vesicular, pustular and crust phases before sloughing off and leaving scars.

The disease is usually self-limiting with symptoms lasting for 2-4 weeks. Occasionally severe cases can occur with a case fatality ratio of 3-6%. The incubation period after exposure to the virus varies between 6-13 days up to 21 days.

Recommendations

Clinicians are asked to look out for signs and symptoms of monkeypox, especially in returned travellers, or contacts of returned travellers and those with a clinically compatible rash.

Sexual Health clinicians need to be particularly alert for the disease, as presentations currently have been picked up in these settings elsewhere.

Clinicians should implement standard contact and droplet precautions if monkeypox is suspected. Contact the infectious diseases physician on-call via Royal Darwin Hospital switchboard to discuss the case before collecting specimens.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment available for monkeypox infection.

Thank you for being alert to possible cases of monkeypox in your practice.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Vicki Krause
Director Centre for Disease Control – Environmental Health

Centre for Disease Control (CDC) phone numbers:

Darwin	8922 8044
Katherine	8973 9049
Nhulunbuy	8987 0357
Tennant Creek	8962 4259
Alice Springs	8951 7540

NT Infectious Disease Specialist is available through the Royal Darwin Hospital switchboard on 8922 8888